

HEILMAN VILLAS (Schcock Court)  
706-720 Orange Avenue  
1080-1090 Seventh Street  
Coronado  
San Diego County  
California

HABS No. CA-2341

HABS  
CAL  
37-CORO,  
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Western Region  
Department of the Interior  
San Francisco, California 94107

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## HEILMAN VILLAS (Babcock Court)

HABS No. CA-2341

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CAL  
37-CORO,  
3-

Location: 706-720 Orange Avenue  
1060-1090 Seventh Street  
City of Coronado  
San Diego County  
California

USGS Point Loma Quadrangle (7.5)  
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
Zone 11, E. 483400 N. 3616720, San Bernardino Meridian

Present Owner: City of Coronado  
1330 First Street  
Coronado, CA 92118

Present Occupant: Vacant.

Present Use: Formerly used as offices for a variety of community groups, including the Chamber of Commerce, Coronado Historical Association, and the Library. Demolition is planned for mid-1993.

### Statement of Significance:

Heilman Villas (Babcock Court) was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1992 as an excellent example of the bungalow court, retaining intact details of artistic design and craftsmanship successfully adapted to a housing form affordable to individuals with modest incomes. The complex expresses the aesthetics of much grander homes of the 1920s period. Ten bungalows and one two-story duplex are grouped on a landscaped central courtyard and surrounding areas of the nearly half-acre lot, affording comfortable interactions between indoor and outdoor living. The stuccoed buildings exhibit Mission-style architectural elements, such as crenellated parapets, canales, and bracketed and mission-tiled awnings. Interiors reflect Craftsman priorities through hardwood floors, built-in writing desks and cabinetry, and arched leaded-glass windows. Overall, the complex conveys clearly the essential qualities that made the bungalow court a successful response to the housing need generated as a result of rapid urban growth in the 1920s. By providing both a sense of community and a separate residence, the bungalow court was a successful compromise between urban tenements and traditional single-family homes.

## PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### A. Physical History

1. **Date of erection:** City of Coronado building permits and inspection records indicate that the buildings were constructed in 1922 (Building Records 1922).
2. **Architect:** Not known.
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** The bungalow court was originally built for Robert and Lillian Heilman, formerly of Pennsylvania (*Coronado Strand* 7/22/22). Between 1922 and 1926, the establishment was known as "Heilman Villas" (Directories). Over the following 25 years the complex changed hands several times. Subsequently it was known as "DeCoby Court" and "Hollander Court." In 1952, the buildings were converted to a motel and renamed "Coromar." In 1973, the City of Coronado purchased the site and made it available to community groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Coronado Historical Association (CHA). Following CHA's initiative, the City renamed the complex "Babcock Court," in honor of Elisha S. Babcock, one of the founders of Coronado (CHA 1991).
4. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** Carl H. Messner is identified as the building contractor in City of Coronado building permits and inspection records (Building Records 1922). In 1922, Mr. Messner and his wife Frances resided at 852 C Avenue in Coronado (Directories). Previously employed as chief engineer at the Hotel del Coronado, Messner apparently formed his own business in 1922 (Directories). Beginning in 1924, Messner advertised as an electrical contractor and supplier, with offices in La Jolla (Directories). Building records also indicate that plumbing was installed by G.A. Hidden.
5. **Original plans and construction:** Heilman Villas (Babcock Court) was built as 10 single-story bungalows and 1 two-story duplex. The two-story building originally contained 2 two-level apartments with interior stairways. No original drawings or plans for the complex have been found; however, several historic photographs depicting the buildings shortly after construction are on file at the Coronado Historical Association.
6. **Alterations and additions:** The single major alteration to the original construction is the 1952 remodeling of the two-story structure from 2 two-story apartments to 4 single-story flats (Building Records 1952). As part of that alteration, a decorative medallion centered in the upper margin of the two-story apartment front facade was removed. Interior alterations associated with the conversion include removal of the interior stairways and installation of bathrooms in the upper apartments; exterior

alterations include the additions of an outside stairway at the center of the building and two new doors. Other alterations of unknown date include removal of two decorative urns from the central courtyard and removal of planter boxes from beneath the bungalow windows.

B. Historical Context:

The situation was ideal in 1922 for the construction of a bungalow court in Coronado. The local economy was strong and the population was growing steadily. Robert Heilman, recently relocated to Coronado from Pennsylvania, hired local contractor C.H. Messner to build the courtyard apartments on a half-acre lot near the trolley lines on Orange Avenue. Heilman Villas was constructed during a phase of significant physical and social growth in southern California.

In the 1920s, strong demographic growth resulted in part from a new and increasing presence of United States Navy installations in the region and many Americans' greater familiarity with the area following World War I. In San Diego County, the population nearly doubled during the 1920s, from 112,200 in 1920 to over 209,700 in 1930 (Griffin 1976:67).

In addition to the impact of the military's growth, San Diego's Panama-California Exposition of 1915 attracted national attention to the city and affected the strength and character of the region's growth in the 1920s. The Spanish Colonial buildings constructed in Balboa Park as part of the exposition expressed the planners' desire to create a distinctive sense of place in San Diego by expanding on the region's Spanish colonial past. Their choice of nationally known architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue to design the primary exposition buildings proved to be highly influential for later architectural trends (Pourade 1965:127-128). The successful exposition attracted millions of visitors to San Diego and encourage the use of similar architectural themes for decades afterward.

Coronado in the 1920s was a focal point for many regional trends. For example, millionaire John D. Spreckels, a prime figure in the development of San Diego County at the time, was a resident of Coronado. The wealthy entrepreneur invested in developing the county's back country resources, urban transportation systems, local industries, and the region's first direct railroad link to the East. In Coronado, Spreckels' accomplishments included completion of the world-famous Hotel del Coronado, construction of the Spreckels Commercial Building on Orange and Loma, and numerous philanthropic projects

An important part of U.S. military development in the San Diego region began in Coronado just before World War I, when the government assumed control of North Island. By 1920, both the Navy and Army had built major establishments on North Island.

An influential development for Coronado and greater San Diego was the Army's choice of well-known architect Alfred Kahn to design Rockwell Field. Kahn's design unified the large campus and various buildings through the adaptation of Mission Revival architecture to military buildings. Overall, the significant growth in the military presence in Coronado contributed to the city's economic and demographic growth during the 1920s.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

Heilman Villas (Babcock Court) consists of 10 Mission Revival single-story bungalows and a larger two-story building arranged on a corner lot of approximately 17,500 square feet. A central courtyard and surrounding lawns are landscaped with Queen Palms, shaped hedges, bougainvillea, and various flowers. The two-story building and 6 of the bungalows face the central courtyard, forming a U that opens to the east toward Orange Avenue. Four additional bungalows face north, toward Seventh Street. The approximately square bungalows facing the courtyard consist of 528 square feet, while the 4 facing Seventh are slightly smaller, consisting of 480 square feet. The larger two-story structure is rectangular, with its long side facing east toward the court; this building contains 1,946 square feet.

1. **Architectural character:** Heilman Villas (Babcock Court) is important as an excellent example of bungalow court architecture. The court exhibits Mission Revival styling with stucco walls, crenellated parapets, decorative and functional canals, and mission-tiled bracketed awnings over the doors and windows. Interior details reflect Craftsman priorities through hardwood floors, built-in writing desks and cabinetry, and arched beveled glass windows.

The complex reflects the qualities that made bungalow courts an ideal response to dramatic shifts in the southern California housing market after World War I. Wartime industry and military service drew thousands of young men and women from rural America to the region and many stayed to seek new urban lifestyles after the war. Concurrent urban improvements, including the streetcar systems made it possible for these young transplants to live away from the city center. Bungalow courts were most often built near trolley lines and provided a successful compromise between urban tenements and traditional single-family homes, offering both a separate residence and sense of community (Curtis and Ford 1988:79-85).

2. **Condition of fabric:** Overall the complex is in good condition, with no more than normal deterioration for a 70-year-old wood building. The main alterations are those associated with the 1952 conversion of the two-story apartment to four flats: addition of the exterior stairway on the front facade and two new doors to the second floor.

apartments, removal of the interior stairways, and replacing two sets of windows with doors on the first floor facade.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** There are 3 building types within the complex: the two-story building and 2 variations on the bungalow. The two-story building has overall dimensions of 52'3" by 22'4". The 4 bungalows that front on Seventh Street measure 24'2" by 20'2" overall, while the 6 bungalows facing the central courtyard (with Orange Avenue addresses) are 24'2" by 22'4".
2. **Foundations:** The perimeters of all the buildings rest on poured-concrete chain walls that are 6" thick. The centers of the buildings rest on 4"x4" wood posts standing on 2" wood blocks.
3. **Walls:** Exteriors are smooth stucco painted white. Substrate beneath the stucco is 1" boarding nailed directly to the studs.
4. **Structural system, framing:** The buildings are framed with 2"x4" studs 16" on center. Ceiling and floor joists are 2"x6" 16" on center. Rafters are 2"x4" 24" on center. Interior walls are load-bearing. Additional structural information may become available as a result of demolition monitoring.
5. **Stoops:** Front entries are afforded by poured-concrete stoops about 1' high with a single intermediate step to the ground level. The two-story building entry has a double-wide stoop that was originally 24' wide and 4'6" deep; later additions at each side have added about 4' to each side of the stoop, so that it is now approximately 36' wide. Front stoops for each of the bungalows are 6' wide and 3' deep, and are placed in the center of the front facades. Access to the rear of the buildings is provided by simple two-step concrete stoops 2'8" wide.
6. **Openings:**
  - a. **Doorways and doors:** Front doors for the bungalows are 3'6" wide, 6'6" high and are centered on the front facades. On the two-story apartment, the original front doors are the same dimensions as those on the bungalows and each is framed by full-length sidelights; they occupy the central two-thirds of the facade. Each entry door contains repeating smaller lights around a large center light, with an ornate brass door handle and integral deadbolt. Two additional doors, replacements for the original windows, located on the outer portions of the two-story apartment front each exhibit a single, large, textured glass light. All doors are framed with wide casings.

Doors to the upper level of the two-story apartment are hollow-core veneered doors. Based on comparison with historic photos, it appears that portions of the two original second-story window units were removed to make way for these added doorways.

Bungalows also have a rear door that opens from the kitchen. These doors have three horizontal panels below a square fixed pane in the top third of the door. At the rear of the two-story apartment is one broken louvered door that provides access only to a water heater space; it appears that a complementary door on the opposite end of the facade has been removed and filled in.

Each front entry is protected by bracketed and tiled shed canopies. Brackets supporting the canopies are shaped and mitered 3" lumber, presently painted dark green. Red mission-tile is laid in short courses over 1" boarding on exposed rafters. On the bungalows, these canopies are slightly wider than the front door stoops they cover. The canopy for the two-story apartment is 25' wide and extends 3' from the side of the building. Smaller awnings on each side of the two-story apartment's front facade originally protected windows, but now cover the doors that replaced them.

- b. **Windows:** Pairs of tall, eight-light casement windows are situated on each side of the fronts, approximately midway between the front door and the end of the facade on all of the bungalows. These same window units are used on the walls of the corner bedroom in each bungalow. Two small fixed eight-light windows are placed on the northeast wall, framing the Murphy bed enclosures, of each bungalow. Pairs of eight-light casement windows shorter than those on the fronts are placed on each wall of the corner kitchen in each bungalow. The bathroom window for each bungalow is a square textured-glass single-light casement.

On the northwest side of each bungalow is a wide fixed multi-pane window with an arched top. The upper portions of these windows are divided by repeating and intersecting arcs, forming an elaborate pattern. For the bungalow facing the courtyard, with Orange Avenue addresses, the muntins are lead within wood frames, while those in the bungalows fronting Seventh Street are completely of wood.

Bracketed and tiled shed canopies much like those described for the entry doors also protect windows on 2 sides of each bungalow. The pairs of casement windows on the front of each bungalow are covered by individual canopies slightly wider than the window units. On the southwest sides of the bungalows along Orange Avenue, the canopies extend across the entire side, protecting one set of

bedroom windows and the 2 small living room windows. In addition, historic photos indicate that there were originally window-boxes under each set of casement windows on the fronts of the buildings, as well as under the bedroom casements on the Orange Avenue side.

As described above, front doors to the first floor of the two-story apartment are flanked by full-height multi-paned casement windows. It is very likely that the windows replaced by doors on the front of this building were identical to the tall, eight-light casement windows on the fronts of the bungalows. This type of window is in each end wall of the building where the corner bedrooms originally were. On the northwest rear wall of the two-story apartment's first floor are 2 wide, fixed windows like those described for the Orange Avenue bungalows, with lead muntins. As with the bungalows, kitchen windows for the two-story apartment are shorter versions of the eight-light casement, but unlike the bungalows, each kitchen only has a window on the end wall. Bathroom windows are identical to the square textured-glass single-light casements on the bungalows.

The upper floor of the two-story apartment appears originally to have had 6 identical sets of windows: 2 each on the front and rear facades and one each on each end facade. Although there have been changes to some, it appears that each set of windows originally consisted of 5 eight-light windows, of which the center 3 were fixed and the outer 2 were casement. Modifications include the installation of doors in replacement of the 2 casement windows nearest the center on the front facade, and several instances of replacing the eight-light pattern with a large single pane. None of the upper-story windows are protected by canopies like those on the bungalows.

#### 7. Roof:

- a. **Shape, covering:** Hidden behind the raised crenellated parapets are peaked roofs with a shallow pitch and crickets to drain water to the canales on the rear side of the bungalows. The upper roof of the two-story apartment is the same as for the bungalows, with the exception that the water is drained via copper downspouts on the outside of the rear wall. Roofing on the exposed portion of the first floor drains to canales on the rear side. Roll roofing covers all of the roofs.

#### C. Description of Interior

##### 1. Floor plans:

- a. **Crawl spaces:** All 10 bungalows and the two-story apartment have crawl spaces approximately 1'6" high under the first floor.

- b. **Bungalows:** The bungalows are laid out to provide a large living-dining-sleeping area in the front half of the building, with a corner kitchen, a corner bedroom, a full bathroom, and 2 closets occupying the back half. The open, full-width main room on the entry side of the bungalow incorporates a dining area on the end near the kitchen and an enclosed Murphy bed on the end near the bedroom. The dining area features the decorative arched window framed by built-in cabinets and arched alcoves. The Murphy Bed is enclosed with a pair of multi-pane French doors; on the left side of the bed enclosure is a built-in writing desk, while on the right is a cabinet. On either side of the bed enclosure, above the built-in desk and cabinet are small six-light casement windows. In the center of the room, on the wall opposite the front door are a gas fireplace and mantle.

Doorways on the center wall lead from the main room to the kitchen and bedroom. The kitchen has built-in cabinets and an appliance unit that incorporates a two-basin sink, a three-burner range, an oven, and enclosed storage space. A small closet stands behind a full-size door between the doorways to the main room and the bathroom. In several bungalows, an exposed water heater stands in the corner of the kitchen next to the back door. The bedroom, situated on the opposite corner of the bungalow, has a small walk-in closet.

The bathroom is centered between the bedroom and kitchen, and both rooms have doors opening into it. The bathrooms contain a sink beneath a mirrored cabinet, a toilet, and a bathtub. It appears that the original bathroom sink was a small oval basin with unmixed hot and cold water faucets on each side; these have been replaced in many bungalows by larger square sinks with mixing faucets. It also appears that the shower units above many of the cast iron bathtubs were added later, along with ceramic tiling on the walls and around the tub enclosure.

- c. **Two-story apartment:** The original floor plan in this building had 2 separate two-story apartments with interior stairs. The first floor plan was much like that of the bungalows, in that it offered a large central room, a corner bedroom, and a corner kitchen. Unlike the bungalows, however, there was no Murphy Bed in the main room; presumably a second bedroom was upstairs. Later modifications include opening of two passageways on the first-floor wall that originally separated the 2 apartments, and removal of the stairways.
2. **Stairways:** As part of the 1952 conversion, an exterior stairway was added to the two-story apartment building. This wooden stairway has 2 small landings, one at the top over the canopy over the first-floor entry and the other near the bottom with 2 short sections of stair set perpendicular to the main stair, giving the stairs a "T" shape.

Information about the location and design of the original interior stairways may become available during demolition monitoring.

3. **Flooring:** In the living rooms and bedrooms, naturally finished red oak flooring is laid over a substrate of 1" boarding. Bathroom floors are white 1" hexagonal ceramic tiles with black grout. The kitchen floors are linoleum.
4. **Wall and ceiling finish:** Original walls and ceilings are smooth plaster over lath. In the living/dining rooms and bedrooms is a 2"x3" cornice. Casings and baseboards are flush with the wall surfaces. In the first floor of the two-story apartment a suspended acoustical tile ceiling has been added, while in some of the bungalows spray-textured ceilings have been added. Interiors are generally painted off-white.
5. **Openings:**
  - a. **Doorways and doors:** As described in the Floor Plan section above, there are doorways from the main room to the bedroom and the kitchen, a doorway from each of those rooms to the bathroom. Doors are frame-and-single-panel. Hardware remnants indicate that the door between the kitchen and the main room was a double-action swinging door.
  - b. **Windows:** The numerous windows described in the Exterior section provide the interiors with abundant natural light. Overall window trim is simple, with only the narrow stool being raised about 1" from the wall surface. Trim around the arched window is also simple, but the built-in cabinetry repeats and emphasizes its shape.
6. **Decorative features and trim:** The primary interiors decorative treatments are in the main room, around the arched window and Murphy Bed enclosure. Arched and beveled alcoves on each side of the arched window enclosure give the room the feeling of a small chapel, while the French doors and half-height built-ins enclosing the Murphy Bed add a library-like feeling.
7. **Hardware:** While much of the original interior hardware has been removed, and in some cases replaced with different styles, it appears that the original door handles were faceted glass.
8. **Mechanical equipment:**
  - a. **Heating, ventilation:** Heat was provided by a gas stove located in the center of the main room. Gas fittings and a vent pipe are in the fireplace on the center wall. Natural ventilation is afforded by the many operable windows.

- b. **Lighting:** Each room has electric light fixtures in the ceiling. The main room has ceiling lights in each end.
- c. **Plumbing:** Original fresh water plumbing to the kitchen and bathroom appears to have been provided by galvanized steel pipe. Waste water drains are standard steel pipe and fittings.

D. Site

1. **General setting and orientation:** Heilman Villas (Babcock Court) is situated on the southwest corner Orange Avenue and Seventh Street, adjacent to the south end of Spreckels Park. This portion of Orange Avenue has a wide grass median, and the park area is generally characterized by wide lawns and mature trees. The City Library is directly across Seventh Street from the court complex. Single-family residential development bounds the property's north and west sides, and a construction yard and vacant lot border it on the southwest.

Six bungalows and the two-story apartment are arranged around a central courtyard that opens to Orange Avenue, while 4 bungalows front Seventh Street. Like the streets it faces, the complex is oriented to a northwest-southeast axis, opening toward the southeast on the Orange Avenue side and toward the northeast on the Seventh Street side. The bungalows are set back approximately 20' from the busier Orange Avenue, and are about 8' from Seventh Street. The central courtyard is approximately 30' wide and 70' long.

2. **Historic landscape design:** In general, the complex retains its original landscape design, with shaped hedges across the bungalow fronts and bougainvillea on trellises. Four large queen palms grow within the central courtyard. However, the original courtyard had a center planting area that has been concreted over, and 2 large urns that once stood at the Orange Avenue entry are now gone.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. **Original Architectural Drawings:** None known.
- B. **Early Views:** Several black-and-white photographs of the complex are on file with the Coronado Historical Association. Most of the known early views are reproduced in this document. These include views of the street frontages circa 1922, a closer view of the central courtyard and two-story apartment circa 1942, and several snapshots of people enjoying the complex in the 1930s and 1940s. One view not included in this document is one of the complex printed in the January 1, 1924 issue of the *San Diego Union*, (page B-5) to illustrate part of Coronado's growing attractions and accommodations; because it is

available only on microfilm the photograph could not be successfully reproduced for this documentation.

**C. Research Methodology and Discussion:**

Historical research conducted for this investigation utilized previously completed studies prepared for the City of Coronado's Environmental Impact Report for the proposed police station, and the National Register nomination form. Additional archival research intended to augment the existing historical information with relevant details was conducted at the following repositories:

Coronado Historical Association history files  
San Diego Historical Society Research Archives  
San Diego State University Library Special Collections  
San Diego Public Library, California Room

A primary goal of the research was to identify the site's designer. Unfortunately, no new information about who the architect was, or if the developer, Robert Heilman, hired an architect. The sole direct source of information for construction details is the building permits and inspection records. While these documents are relatively reliable, they are incomplete in that they do not identify the designer. The building records identify only the owner (Heilman) and the builder, C.H. Messner. Additional research revealed that Carl H. Messner was a native of Ohio who moved to San Diego in 1909 at the age of 28 (*San Diego Union* 7/5/1965:9:2). He began his career in San Diego as a lineman, and by 1907 had taken a job as an electrician for the Hotel del Coronado, where he remained an employee for 15 years (Directories). In 1924, two years after Heilman Villas was built, Messner was listed as an electrical contractor with home and offices in La Jolla. While it is certainly possible that Messner designed the bungalow court, it seems a bit anomalous to his career as an electrician.

The unanswered question of who designed the complex remains the key shortcoming of the research to date. While it was common during the 1920s for builder/contractors without architectural training to design and build homes on their own, this complex reflects an unusually fine balance. It would be interesting to know more about the designer's background, whether it was Mr. Messner or someone yet unidentified.

**D. Bibliography:**

**1. Primary and unpublished sources**

Building Records

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**2. Secondary and published sources**

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*Coronado Strand*

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Source Point

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#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This Historic American Buildings Survey document is prepared in compliance with a requirement of the Environmental Impact Report for the City of Coronado Police Station project, as part of measures intended to mitigate cultural resource impacts resulting from the demolition of the subject property. The project is administered by the City of Coronado Department of Engineering Services, under the supervision of Mr. Thomas R. O'Toole, Capital Improvements Coordinator. Guidance concerning the form and content of the document has been provided by Ms. Ann Huston, HABS/HAER Coordinator for the Western Regional Office of the National Park Service. The firm with primary responsibility for preparing this document is Robert D. Ferris, Architect, with Mr. Paul Johnson as Project Manager. Measured drawings were prepared by Paul Johnson. Photographs and written information were prepared by William R. Manley, with research assistance from James D. Newland. This document has been prepared during February and March, 1993.